

2nd World Conference on Educational Technology Researches – WCETR2012

Social Media- A pragmatic Approach: Contexts & Implicatures

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Abstract

The present paper aims at approaching Social Media from a Pragmatic point of view. Implicatures and contexts in social media are also taken into account as linguistic tools that may facilitate such an approach. Communication — the sharing of information, ideas, and thoughts — is a vital part of life for all of us. The different methods that allow us to communicate are called media. A postcard to a friend, a telephone call, and a computer disk holding homework are all types of media. Some of these have developed beyond simple methods of communication to become sophisticated tools, capable of persuading and influencing large numbers of people. It seems that nowadays the techniques for building a Social Media presence have acquired an outmost importance. Our analysis will centre on Social Media sites with a special focus on British newspaper blogs.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Hafize Keser Ankara University, Turkey

Keywords: Social media, Pragmatics, Implicature, Context, Blog

1. Introduction

Life today cannot be imagined without spending some time at least checking e-mails, shopping, access bank accounts, booking hotel reservations and using Social Media - Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Google for fun, relaxation or just for merely keep in touch with friends. We 'chat' by text using instant messaging. Some of us send video messages via our social network profile page. We 'google' instead of looking things up in books or directories. We sign online petitions, and in some countries we can now vote online in local and even national elections. The internet and the world wide web are becoming more and more essential in our modern urban lives. With the rise of social media and online networks being used by hundreds of millions of people around the world, the cultural online behaviours are evolving rapidly and with powerful effect.

2. Overview of the literature

Further on we would like to delimitate some theoretical background issues that will represent tools in our analysis. Thus, *Social Media, Implicatures, Contexts* and *Blogs* will prove indispensable in our endeavour.

2.1. Social media

Social Media refers to issues such as blogging, photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Cyworld and they improve and expand the ways people interact both publicly and privately. This implies that the cultural element that is present in these environments is utterly important for decoding and understanding what is going on. Moreover, the Internet environment has its own rules and etiquette where there are accepted ways of behavior that have deep cultural markers which are totally different from the legal markers or from

the rules of the real world. We see that, under the cover of anonymity, people feel free to use blogs and forums as they want, without any constraints which could be imposed by the society in real life. More than that, people use language as they want, without (sometimes) respecting any grammatical or spelling rules.

2.2. Contexts and Implicatures

Context and Implicature represent another important linguistic tools that will allow us to analyse Social Media sites i.e. British newspapers blogs. According to Cruse Alan (2006) context is an essential factor in the interpretation of utterances and expressions. The most important aspects of context are:

- (1) preceding and following utterances and/or expressions ('co-text'),
- (2) the immediate physical situation,
- (3) the wider situation, including social and power relations
- (4) knowledge presumed shared between speaker and hearer.

As far as the *Conversational Implicature* is concerned, we could say that this represents the principle according to which an utterance is always understood in accordance with what one can expect in a certain conversational setting. Moreover, it is something implied, meant or suggested, different from what is plainly said.

2.3. Blogs/weblogs/blogosphere

A blog is a website where individuals, groups, companies, media trusts can publish a log of events, personal considerations or other materials. It is very easy to use and the content may be published in a matter of minutes. According to Cambie *"It is different from a forum in that each contribution to a discussion thread in a forum is given equal weighting - you will see each contribution in equally weighted font and text styles - whereas on a blog, the main author's 'article' or post is given priority weighting through layout, design and text formatting - others may add their comments to the main post but those comments will be seen as subsidiary to the main item. In this way, blogs tend to have an 'authored' feel to them whereas forums are equivalent to discussion groups.* (Cambie, 2009: 100). Teodora Popescu considers that weblogs represent websites with a standardized but at the same time flexible structure built on a CMC (content management system). As compared to traditional mass media communication, weblogs support the interaction of authors (bloggers) with their readers. Weblogs form the blogosphere which represents the new virtual communicative space.

3. Contexts and implicatures in British Newspapers Blogs

As we have previously stated, the present paper is dedicated to observing the implications of language usage and its conversational implicatures in relation to a specific context (British Newspapers Blogs). The interesting aspect about this type of investigation is that the context and the corresponding use of language are always extremely particular. The interaction between language and context produces a set of unique characteristics. The fact that language usage is a very dynamic process, through the various ways it can be interpreted, through the various linguistic instruments used to achieve a goal, through the active impact it has on surrounding variables confirms why it is worthwhile studying. It is both useful and interesting to gain insight into how and why is language redirected. Rapport is an important element in noticing the real, tangible effects of language. Rapport may be viewed as an indicator of how language works because the two concepts reflect each other. The cause and effect relationship represents an important clue in shedding light on this matter. The corpus that we base our study on consists of different British Newspapers Blogs. We shall see how non-traditional conversational implicatures are constructed, they being very personal and naturally context-dependent. Our analysis will base on the following coordinates:

- 1. The immediate physical situation**
- 2. The wider situation, including social and power relations**
- 3. Knowledge presumed shared between blog writer and blog reader.**
- 4. What is said/what is implied – The Conversational Implicature**

3.1 Context & The Conversational Implicatures - Queen's diamond jubilee: Thames flotilla - as it happened

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk>) - Celebrations mark Queen Elizabeth II's 60 years on the throne, including the Thames river pageant

1. The immediate physical situation: The celebrations that took place in the UK to mark Queen Elizabeth II's 60 years to the throne.

2. The wider situation, including social and power relations: The Monarchy in Britain has a very strong position. But this has been recently challenged by ordinary people. Even if the Guardian's official position is in favour of the Queen and the Monarchy as an institution, the blog responses reflect negative opinions regarding this.

3. Knowledge presumed shared between blog writer and blog reader: Monarchy is very important, blessed by God and everybody should cherish it.

4. What is said/what is implied – The Conversational Implicature:

As forecast, the heavens have opened and it's a pretty damp day out there so far, not that rain seems to have deterred many of the Queen's admirers who are already beginning to line the banks of the Thames before the nautical parade. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/blog/2012/jun/03/queens-diamond-jubilee-pageants-parties-live>).

- *The heavens have opened* – the monarchy is blessed by God, thus God has opened heaven for this manifestation. Nevertheless, what is implied is a play upon words as it actually refers to the heavy rain that marked the jubilee. PeteFaulkner, a blogger comments challenging the whole assumption: *And it's wet, wet, wet! Enjoy your day, soggy monarchists and assorted cap doffers! But seriously, doesn't this prove the Queen is either a liar or despised by God? I'll explain my logic. The Queen claims to be God's lieutenant here on Earth. But if that were true, then God wouldn't let it rain heavily on her multi-million pound procession would he? So either she is lying or God hates her.* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/blog/2012/jun/03/queens-diamond-jubilee-pageants-parties-live>)

3.2. Context & The Conversational Implicature - Winston Churchill: father of the Anglosphere (<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk>)

1. The immediate physical situation: In many conservative circles, particularly in the United States, Winston Churchill is beyond criticism.

2. The wider situation, including social and power relations: Winston Churchill played a very important role in all the three major historical events in the twentieth century. He served in WWI, led the UK to victory in WWII and set the coordinates in the third - The Cold War. The transition from victorious leader to Cold Warrior can be traced to his famous speech which was delivered on 5 March 1946 at Fulton, Missouri.

3. Knowledge presumed shared between blog writer and blog reader: According to the author of the article, Winston Churchill is a legendary figure and his personality does not pose any challenges. His role in the twentieth century is a unique one and everybody agrees with this.

4. What is said/what is implied – The Conversational Implicature

Fair enough. Winnie got the big calls right. His popularity on the other side of the Atlantic is appropriate, for he is perhaps the supreme Anglosphere politician – apostle, champion, exemplar and historian of English-speaking unity. (<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/danielhannan/100163808/winston-churchill-father-of-the-anglosphere/>)

Winnie got the big calls right – Winston Churchill is the supreme politician both in the UK and the USA because he was an apostle, champion and historian also. Here the intended meaning and the Conversational Implicature go together and the Maxims of Conversation are respected. Nevertheless, this assumption is challenged by one of the commentators on the blog, the later negating in fact the common knowledge background. According to happy boy, *Churchill said the history books will be kind to him, because he will write them. In other words, he could exaggerate the importance he played in British history So it is fitting that he should win the Nobel prize for literature, because most of his memories of the war were fictional! After the war, at Yalta, Churchill agreed to round up 2 million Russian nationals in Germany, Italy and France to be forcibly deported to Russia for execution You wont find that in any of his memoirs!* (<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/danielhannan/100163808/winston-churchill-father-of-the-anglosphere/>)

3.3. *Context & The Conversational Implicature* - Bank bailout makes Spaniards question their future as euro agonies mount (<http://www.guardian.co.uk>)

1. The immediate physical situation: Spaniards having to tighten their belts find it hard to stomach bailing out banks whose recklessness has brought them to ruin.

2. The wider situation, including social and power relations: Recently, Spain has directed towards Europe's biggest and most dangerous bailout. People have become worried about its consequences. Recession, unemployment and austerity have caused major changes in people's lives.

3. Knowledge presumed shared between blog writer and blog reader: The writer of the blog founds his opinions on things considered as common knowledge. People have the tendency of accusing banks and bankers of the state of the things, forgetting that it was they themselves who have resorted to the latter's services

4. What is said/what is implied – The Conversational Implicature

Seven years ago a local savings bank persuaded Reyes, a cleaner, to take out a 100% mortgage to buy the flat for €195,000 (£157,000). The bank has since merged with half a dozen others, all of which had thrown bad money at property speculators, to form a sick giant called Bankia. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/03/spain-euro-austerity-bailout>)

According to the author - a local savings bank **persuaded** Reyes – this implies that the bank persuaded him to take the loan. The Conversational Implicature here is that that person did not have any intentions of taking the loan, it was just the bank's fault that he actually performed this action. The author's opinion is also shared by spongepaddy who says that *Justice won't be done until we see bankers and real estate agents hanging from lampposts for ruining economies. I don't even know how real estate agents in particular are allowed to exist as a profession. A more lying, deceitful, smug, arrogant and useless bunch of pricks you'd be hard-pressed to find. Why do we put up with them? And when do we say enough's enough?* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/03/spain-euro-austerity-bailout>)

3.4. *Context & The Conversational Implicature* - Victims of forced marriage now know that what is happening to them is wrong, illegal and can be stopped (<http://blogs.independent.co.uk>)

1. The immediate physical situation: The article refers to what has recently happened in Iran, i.e. the Government announced it had plans to make forcing someone to marry a criminal offence.

2. The wider situation, including social and power relations: The epistemic background refers to a very common situation that is still met in countries in the Arab world. Thus, in these countries, forced marriage is still a custom that is deeply grounded in the mass consciousness. Unlike countries in Europe or Northern America, in Iran, forced marriage represents a general truth widely accepted by people of all categories.

3. Knowledge presumed shared between blog writer and blog reader: The author presumes that the readers of the blog are all aware of this situation. It is interesting how the commentators reacted to this situation.

4. What is said/what is implied – The Conversational Implicature

Forced marriage can also lead to physical violence, imprisonment, rape and even 'honour' killing. Women and girls from the communities that we work with have suffered these violations for too long. Now at last the law is on their side, telling them unequivocally that what is happening to them is wrong, illegal and can be stopped. Some commentators have expressed concerns that the new law could deter victims of forced marriage from coming forward. In fact, many of the women and girls that IKWRO has worked with support criminalisation and have told us that their parents would not have gone through with plans to force them into a marriage if they had faced the threat of criminal sanction. Some believe that the criminal law would have enabled them to stand up to their parents and to say no. (<http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2012/06/09/victims-of-forced-marriage-now-know-that-what-is-happening-to-them-is-wrong-illegal-and-can-be-stopped/>) According to the author, *victims of forced marriage now know that what is happening to them is wrong, illegal and can be stopped*. The Conversational Implicature here is derived from the very substance of the verb "to know". It is natural that those victims should know that what was happening to their lives was not normal. By using the verb "to know" it is implied that these victims acknowledge, understand and even accept that. The author might have used the verb to tell in the Passive, that is "victims have been told" but this would have implied that the victims had not been aware of the situation. The verb to know implies that they have mentally accepted change. This opinion is also supported by different commentators on the blog. Blackfirscharlie considers that *This has been prevalent for many decades, why has it taken so long for action*

to be taken? Nothing to do with cynically distracting attention from the appalling behaviour of this government? (<http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2012/06/09/victims-of-forced-marriage-now-know-that-what-is-happening-to-them-is-wrong-illegal-and-can-be-stopped/>). Gondorplace further on adds that *It is a national disgrace that such laws have not already been put in place, considering how long this problem has been present in our society. We need to stop calling those people 'parents', as they do not deserve that title.* (<http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2012/06/09/victims-of-forced-marriage-now-know-that-what-is-happening-to-them-is-wrong-illegal-and-can-be-stopped/>).

4. Conclusions

As we have previously seen, Social Media plays a very important role in the contemporary society. The fact that nowadays people interactively get involved into the blogosphere and add their opinions as they wish is utterly significant in the development of the future press, be it written or online press. Linguistic tools such as the ones we have made use in our paper have the role of making the commentators aware of their power but these tools also indicate the fact that people may be manipulated by means of what is implied. Communication nowadays is vital for sharing information, personal issues which shape the environment and the world around us. Bloggers use Social Media to express themselves. Social Media facilitates interactivity because one may express himself/herself as one wishes as he/she may benefit from the cover of anonymity. Thus bloggers have more courage in expressing themselves and this leads to more and more non-conventional Conversational Implicatures and more and more instances when the Conversational Maxims are flouted to convey meanings never implied before.

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